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The Reasons for the Emergence of Violent Behavior and Attempted Murder from the Perspective of Male Killers: A qualitative study

Ahmad Kalateh Sadati [a], Kurosh Zare [b*], Fatemeh Teymuri [a], Seyyed Taghi Heydari [c], Hossein Afrasiabi [a]

[a] Department of Sociology, School of Social Sciences, Yazd University, Yazd, Iran.
[b] Department of Law, Islamic Azad University of Shiraz, Shiraz, Iran.
[c] Health Policy Research Center, Shiraz University of Medical Sciences, Shiraz, Iran.

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***Corresponding Author:**
Kurosh Zare

Email:
kouroshzare94@gmail.com

Tel: :+98 9173073150

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ABSTRACT

Background: Murder is a violent social behavior, which stems from various reasons. The purpose of the present research is to evaluate the reasons for murder from the perspective of killers.
Methods: The present research is a qualitative study which involves 23 male killers sampled purposefully from Adel Abad prison in Shiraz. After conducting a semi-structured interview, data was analysed through qualitative content analysis.
Results: The results showed that three reasons including Honor (fear of prolongation of trial, recognition of the legitimacy of murder), unintentional (mental stress, consumption of alcohol and psychotropic substances, availability of weapons), and subcultural values (considering crime to be a normal event) are the major reasons for emergence of murder among these people. Results of the research indicate that murder occurs based on interpretive structures of actors; which form their values and behaviors and potentially can lead to murder.
Conclusion: In order to decline violent behavior especially murder; policies of the judicial system in the country should ensure security for citizens. This security can be achieved through non-prolonged trials, timeliness of law especially in matters of Honor, banning weapons in civil society and ultimately reducing the influence of anti-social and subcultural values in various social contexts.

Keywords: Violent Behavior, Murder, Qualitative Method, Interpretive Sociology

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Introduction

Violence, premeditated murder and killing are the most severe types of crime committed by human beings which always have been the major problems in past and present societies.[1] Murder is a violent behavior that causes loss of human and material costs for the murderer and murdered and also for the social system. The most severe crime which can be committed against physical entirety is murder. Intentional deprivation of life from another living human is one of the natural universal crimes and always has been forbidden from the perspective of reason and law. Due to the undesirable effects of this crime including deprivation of security and safety from the community and disrupting public order; from the distant past until now, this crime has always been considered for the most severe punishments.[2]

Focus on subcultural values is a part of criminological theories about murder. From the viewpoint of Klvvard and Ohlin, criminal gangs commit various types of illegal activities but it was also mentioned that these gangs somewhat carry out specialized subcultures of crime which depends on illegal opportunities in their neighbourhood.[3] Another subcultural theory is Sykes and Matza theory to justify deviant behavior. In their opinion, deviants utilize five following ways to justify their deviation.

1- Denial of responsibility: Criminals argue that superior forces- such as poverty, poor educational preparation or bad models (bad friends) led them to commit a crime.

2- Denial of damage: crimes like sabotage, or block traffic near a university are called prank or mischief. Such terms show that these measures are not serious offences.

3- Blaming the victim: Criminals acknowledge that they have damaged another person but believe that the victim has been 'cause' or stimulant for such behavior.

4- Condemning the authorities: Outlaws often insist that police or state authorities are real culprits. Violence and corruption of political figures are implied to justify deviant or criminal behavior.

5- Invoking the higher authorities or principles: people to illegally justify their measures through connecting to standards more important than law – i.e. unwritten criminal laws like 'never scream at a friend' or religious and ethical beliefs to justify civil disobedience that represents the behavior to be logical.[4]

Murder motive is different in various communities due to economic, social, ethical, cultural, religious and political conditions. Generally, motives to commit murder include selfishness, greed, money, hurt feelings, family disputes, sexual motivation, conflicts leading to murder, preventing the disclosure of crimes and identification of criminal.[5] Some studies have been conducted in this field. In an article 'aetiology of serial murders on the basis of personality disorders' Gholamlou (2011) has evaluated aetiology of serial murders from the psychological viewpoint and on basis of personality disorders. During this study two major and common disorders-narcissism and being anti-social have been evaluated.[6] Jahed et al. (2011), in an article 'evaluating factors involved in the premeditated murder in Ardebil Province' obtained the following results: the major factors involved in premeditated murder reflect the incidence of social problems including conflict, disputes, ethical issues and revenge. Also, the results showed that, revenge due to Honor issues leads to committing murder more frequently than any other.[7] Arabnezhad et al. (2011), in an article 'factors related to violence and background among 18–35 years old youth in Kerman prison' suggested that communication with delinquent friends, joining conflict groups, crime justification, history of expulsion from school and alcohol consumption have a significant relation with a background of violence and crime.[8] Sarrami (2014) has suggested in an article 'evaluating causes of death caused by addiction, drug trafficking and psychotropics' that the origin of many social damages and problems

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such as theft, fornication and murder have root in drugs and psychotropics.[9] Hosseini et al. (2015), in an article 'criminological investigation of serial killings in Karaj' showed that lust and poverty are main factors involved in commitment of serial murders. Poverty underlies and forms many crimes. Also, the results indicated most of the criminals involved in serial killings have suffered from mental and psychological disorders or have been the victim of crime in their childhood. The purpose of the present research is an evaluation of causes of murder from the perspective of male killers.[10] Therefore, the question asked in this research is what causes from the perspective of the killers have been proposed as reasons behind the murder committed?

Methods

The method of the present research is qualitative. Data collection was conducted from January 2016 to March 2016 through a semi-structured interview with 23 male killers in Adel-Abad prison in Shiraz. Samples were selected purposefully and the basis of finishing sampling was saturation. In order to conduct this research, entry to the section of killers in the prison was allowed by Deputy of Crime Prevention in Shiraz Prosecutor. Then in the mentioned section, purposes of the research were explained to killers who were willing to be interviewed and the semi-structured interview was conducted. The question was what causes have led to commit them the murder in their opinion.

Interviews were recorded and then written on paper with awareness of participants and with observance of ethics in the research and specifically the principle of anonymity of participants.

Conventional content analysis was used which describes the phenomenon in order to collect data. In this type of analysis, the data should be analysed without having a hypothesis or predetermined theory to present a general description of the truth. In this method, data is analysed through reading all the data on a frequent basis in order to obtain a generally engaging concept of data. Reading was conducted as if the person is reading a new content. Then data was read word by word to obtain codes with highlighting exact words of the text which give key concepts or ideas. Then the researcher approaches the text through writing points, ideas or initial analysis. Meanwhile he is finding the process, tagging codes reflexively to reach more than one key opinion. This process often comes out from the text directly and gives an overall conception of initial coding. Then codes are classified into categories and placed in significant clusters in an organised way. Ideally the number of the clusters is between 10 and 15 key clusters which are obtained from a large number of codes.[11]

Therefore, the conventional content analysis is conducted based on the total impression of text, which is obtained through rereading, and also coding and extraction of categories. In this method, data analysis and interpretation is carried out through categorization and inductive manner. In the process of content analysis based on induction, the initial coding and collecting the similar codes in a unique category lead to the creation of 10 to 15 initial categories.[12] In the next stages of the research, the categories are compared to each other and some of them which are more similar are placed in more general categories. Each one of these intermediate categories defines a certain part or class of issue of the research. The categories can be placed in relation to each other and collected in the main category with a higher level of abstraction. Relation of intermediate categories can be adjusted in form of an open network, hierarchical relationship, in chronological order or scientific network.

Since the present research is a qualitative study, its validity criteria are different from quantitative research. In this research, the researchers used three methods to provide validity of data analysis that includes:

A) Evaluation by the participants: For this purpose, the researcher shared result in each part with the participant and confirmation by

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participant determined a part of the validity of the research.

B) Angling: Angling is data analysis by more than one researcher and comparing the result with each other. In this research two researchers did the coding. Final confirmation of results and their coordination with each other is another criterion for the validity of the research.

C) Trust: Trust in a qualitative research means that findings that are worth reflecting. Trust is an important issue in the analysis of content which has been conducted inductively and without matrices of the basis theory. Trust has high importance during data collection, analysis and presentation of results. In this research, through the best collection method, analysis and reporting of data were considered as the trust criterion. Using rich, suitable and saturated data is one of the strategies for trust.

Results

Results in this research indicated that all participants regret the fact that murder has made them be in prison for a long time. Another concern of participants is a lack of information about the future of their case; if they are sentenced to death or not. Another concern of the participants was the effect that imprisonment and murder had on their family life. Some of them were head of household and since had been imprisoned, providing resources for their families had faced challenges and they were worried about living conditions of their families. Coding data indicated that generally, there are three causes for the incidence of murder including Honor, unintentional and subcultural values. An important point in murders is activeness of a type of interpretive approach in actors to somehow legitimize their behavior. The purpose of legitimacy is not that all of them defined it legitimately, but it means that in all murders killers' interpretation about causes and justifications of murder is highly active. Derived contents are as following:

Honor

Honor murder, which represents much of murders is a result of victim's attempted rape or killer's suspicion of the killed about rape or other forms of behavior that somehow causes a desecration of killer's family. In this kind of murders, with logical justifications and reasons killer identifies the location of the killed deliberately and purposefully and by providing the murder weapon that is generally firearm. Most of the killers have proposed two specific justifications about Honor murders. First, defending the Honor is a religious duty so attempted murder in these cases is perfectly legitimate. Therefore, they didn't consider themselves as the killer but considered themselves those who have committed a legitimate murder and now are imprisoned. Second, the killer has attempted murder due to the concern about prolongation of trial and despair of timely action by law. In fact, the main cause of murder in these cases has been killer's disappointment of timely action by the judicial system to execute the killed so they have attempted murder themselves.

Unintentional

Three issues are proposed about unintentional. Unintentional means that killer has not committed murder deliberately but he has done it due to high mental pressure and also did not predict murder. Participant 3 is a person who after an argument with the killed fled to his home and when the killed went to his house shot him under the mental pressure. The second major cause in unintentional has been alcohol consumption, the killer was not able to control his behavior, clashed with the victim and killed him. Eventually using a melee weapon in conflict and without previous intent has been the third cause in this type of murders. Participant 13 is a person who has used a fruit knife and the knife has cut the victim's jugular vein and eventually led to the death of victim. In all these murders, killers didn't consider themselves as the killer and refused murderer identity. They believed that murder has occurred due to chance and accident and because they didn't have the

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intent to murder so they are not killers. The murder has occurred in an accident.

Subcultural values

Some participants were those who had no remorse and regret. In their opinion crime was a normal issue that was caused by cultural backgrounds. They defined the process of murder completely natural as if nothing has happened. Interview with them showed they have been strongly affected by subcultural values in their social context. Murder for this type of people was a type of anti-social behavior which is not considered anti-social from the perspective of the killer. Interview with them showed if a person has imperfect socialization and is in a space that crime is considered a normal thing, deviant behavior may be internalized for him. So, they were not sorry for the attempted murder or involvement in the murder but the most important affliction of them was the possibility to be executed. Their biographies showed they have been educated in specific environments and social contexts where anti-social behavior has been considered a part of that subculture. This subculture doesn't consider murder as a deviant behavior but defines it a natural reaction against others' behavior where the only cost of that can be execution. The culture of not accepting force and reacting to bully in the worst form was clear in this type of behavior (Table 1).

Table 1. Encoded data on the reasons for attempting murder from the perspective of male killers

Theme	Category	Concept	Proposition
Honor	Legitimacy of murder	Protection of honor	I did this for my honor.
		Protecting honor is a religious duty.	God told us to protect our honor.
	Delayed trials in honor murders	Negligence from Justice system	In honor cases, they help you late.
Unintentional	Psychological pressure and behavioral imbalance	Enormous psychological pressure	Under enormous psychological pressure, I committed the murder; I have no previous intention to kill.
		Alcohol consumption took my control	I lost control due to alcohol consumption and attempted murder.
	Unpredictability of murder	Murder was committed with no previous intention and I did not play a role.	I did not want to kill him, I threw the fruit knife and it hit his neck.
Subcultural values	Counting anti-social behavior as normal	Normalization of deviant behavior	I just pushed him to the wall and choked him.
		Subcultural values	In our region scarify (stabbing) is honor.
		Arms' trade	My job is to buy and sell Kalashnikov rifles; I have been doing this for years.

Discussion

Results in the present research showed three reasons, namely, Honor, unintentional and ruling subcultural values as causes for the incidence of murder among the participants. In Honor murder, the person doesn't identify himself as a killer and believes that his behavior has been a legitimate behavior against rape and killer is not sorry because of his action. This finding is consistent with results found in research of Jahed. Results in

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research of Jahed et al (2011).[7] showed revenge due to Honor issues leads to murder more than other revenges. Also, Hoseini et al (2015).[10] in a research 'criminological investigation of serial killings' showed lust and poverty are factors involved in serial killings.

In unintentional, most of the killers were aware that their intent and purpose has been not murder and never predicted that their action will lead to murder, in fact they were under mental pressure or didn't have control on their behavior at that moment due to consumption of psychedelic or mental pressure. In this type of murder again killer doesn't identify himself as a killer because he believes this action has occurred inadvertently and he has had no motive to murder. This finding is consistent with results in research of Sarami. Sarami[9] showed that the origin of many social damages and problems such as murder has root in drug and psychedelic. In the present research consumption of alcohol and psychedelic has been the agent of murder in two participants. Also, in two other cases the mental pressure caused a condition that led to murder.

In a murder which is caused by values of subculture; murder is due to anti-social behaviors. The person accepts deviant behavior due to the effect of a deviant environment and knows crime as normal and do not refuse to attempt it. Here we see the formation of an anti-social personality in social contexts that attempts to murder easily. The only concern of the killer is law and execution and he is not sorry for his action. These findings are consistent with a part of Gholamlou's findings[6] in an article 'aetiology of serial killings on the basis of personality disorders' which has evaluated aetiology of serial killings from the psychological viewpoint and on basis of personality disorders and two major and common disorders narcissism and anti-social behavior have been evaluated. Also this finding is consistent with results in research of Arabnezhad[8] that showed communication with delinquent friends, joining conflict groups, crime justification, history of expulsion from school and alcohol consumption have a significant relation with a background of violence and crime.

Summarizing the results of this research, it can be said that all three causes of murder in this study are based on social contexts, concepts and values related to that. Although killer in unintentional was sorry about the murder and had a feeling of conscience but they knew that claiming to be unintentional is a justification to be innocent of murder. Of course, two participants didn't have this justification. But killers in Honor murders and also those killers who had been adapted in anti-social subculture had no feelings of remorse, conscience or guilt. According to Sykes and Matza about neutralization process for crime,[4, 13] it seems that somehow all participants in this study are involved in legitimization process of the committed crime. In the first group, prolongation of trial in addition to legal issues showed murder to be a legal matter for participants. In the second group, not having intent was enough reason to justify that and the third group was so deviant due to values of subculture that they considered murder basically as a normal thing and recognize no need to legitimize that. In this subcultural view murder has been a decisive response for the killer.

Conclusion

The present research indicated Honor, unintentional and subcultural values are the three causes of murder from the perspective of killers. The important point is killers have had a type of interpretive perception about murder that includes a type of justification process. It means that in Honor murder, killer defined murder as a normal matter in order to defend Honor. In unintentional, killer considered the issue of having no purpose and motive to murder a reason enough to justify it, although he was sorry about the murder that he had committed. In murders based on subcultural values, poor socialization had caused killer to not regret the murder and his subcultural values were preventing him from the feeling of conscience. Execution was the only concern in this type of crimes. Generally, it can be said that due to

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formation of justification among killers, justice system needs to secure citizens through timely action in rape, banning any type of melee weapon and firearms among citizens and eventually promoting culture in society through condemning values of anti-social cultures, especially in gangs.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest in this work.

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Authors' Contribution

Conceptualization, A.K.S. and S.T.H.; Methodology, A.K.S., H.A., K.Z., and S.T.H.; Investigation, A.K.S., H.A., K.Z., and S.T.H.; Writing – Original Draft, A.K.S. and F.T.; Writing – Review & Editing, A.K.S. and F.T.; Funding Acquisition, K.Z.; Resources, S.T.H.; Supervision, A.K.S. and H.A.

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